THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) An India-EU Troika Senior Officials Meeting took place on 2nd May 2002 in New Delhi at Foreign Secretary level as part of the institutionalized dialogue with the EU. Apart from being India's largest trading partner, India and EU have a shared strategic partnership based on commitment to democracy and rule of law as well as promotion of socio-economic development and prosperity. The strength of the relationship is reflected in the institutionalization of annual summits between India and the European Union.

Sponsor for issuance of visas

947. SHRI SUNIL SHASTRI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the names of the countries who insist for a sponsor before issuing visas to Indian Nationals;

(b) whether Government also propose to adopt similar rules/policy while issuing visas to foreign nationals; and

(c) if not, the reasons thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) to (c) The information is being collected and will be laid on the table of the house.

Haj Act

948. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Haj Bill passed by Parliament has received assent of the President; and

(b) if so, by when the Haj Act is going to be notified for implementation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) The Haj Bill was pased by Parliament as the Haj Committee Act 2002 (35 of 2002) and was assented to by the President on June 11, 2002.

(b) The Haj Committee Act 2002 will be notified for implementation after the Rules have been framed under Clause 44 of the Act.

Seminar on Kashmir

949. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a seminar on Kashmir is sought to be organised under the aegis of the United Nations Security Council;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have communicated its viewpoint with regard to this indirect attempt to internationalize the Kashmir issue; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) The facts in this regard are that Mexico had attempted to arrange an informal briefing for Security Council members by NGOs and academics on India-Pakistan tensions. This initiative was not a meeting of the Security Council itself. However, even this informal briefing did not take place.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. India has conveyed bilaterally to all countries which are in the Security Council and many others that the tensions between India and Pakistan are a direct result of Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism. Pakistan must put a permanent end to such support and also dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. The permanent members of the Security Council and most other countries have understood our point of view.

Lifting overflight ban imposed on Pakistan

950. SHRI BALWANT SINGH RAMOOWALIA:
SHRIMATI SHABANA AZMI:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have lifted overflight ban imposed on Pakistani aircraft and called back battle ships following an assurance from U.S. that Pakistani President was serious about checking infiltration of militants into Jammu and Kashmir;